DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 387 EC 307 121

AUTHOR	Vandercook, Terri
TITLE	Weaving Tapestries of Inclusion: Seven Threads To Strengthen School Membership.
INSTITUTION	Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Inst. on Community Integration.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.; Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1999-03-00
NOTE	23p.
CONTRACT	H086J20010; H023R30029
AVAILABLE FROM	Publications Office, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 109 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Dr. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455; Tel: 612-624-4512; Web site: http://www.ici.coled.umn.edu/ici/
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Inclusive Schools; Mainstreaming; *Regular and Special Education Relationship; *Teacher Collaboration

ABSTRACT

This monograph discusses the findings of two federally funded research projects that brought together university, school district, and state education personnel, along with families, to find ways to weave a tapestry of inclusion in the context of general education reform efforts. Among the lessons learned were that there are seven types of threads necessary to create a strong, lasting tapestry of inclusion. These necessary factors include: recognizing and helping others to recognize the contributions each child can make to the school community, commitment to being open to new ways of thinking and doing, recognition of the complexity involved in creating inclusive educational programs, awareness and focus on circle of influence rather than circle of concern, effective communication, courage to speak up in a considerate way, and effective collaboration. The monograph describes the importance of each of these factors, along with personal thoughts from parents, teachers, and students. A chart illustrates traditional and alternative service delivery paradigms. The monograph closes by urging schools to weave these threads to create a tapestry that both sets the stage for creating an inclusive school and sustaining these efforts on an ongoing basis. (CR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 429 387

Weaving tapestries of Inclusion

Seven Threads to Strengthen School Membership

By Terri Vandercook

Together We're Better
Inclusive School Communities in Minnesota/
Partnerships for Systems Change

Institute on Community Integration (UAP)

The College of Education & Human Development

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

EC 307121

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Weaving Tapestries of Inclusion

Seven Threads to Strengthen School Membership

By Terri Vandercook

Together We're Better
Inclusive School Communities in Minnesota/
Partnerships for Systems Change

Institute on Community Integration (UAP)

The College of Education & Human Development
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Published March 1999

By Terri Vandercook, Director of Together We're Better project, Assistant Professor, Special Education Department, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota.

This publication as well as the research effort was partially supported by *Together We're Better: Inclusive School Communities in Minnesota/Partnerships for Systems Change* (Grant Number #H086J20010) awarded by the U. S. Department of Education to the Minnesota Department of Education and the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, and *Shared Responsibility* (Grant Number # H023R30029) awarded by the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services to the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota in collaboration with the Hopkins School District, Hopkins, Minnesota. This document does not necessarily reflect the views of the U. S. or Minnesota Departments of Education, Institute on Community Integration, or the University of Minnesota, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

This publication is available in altenative formats upon request.

For additional copies or alternative formats contact —

Publications Office
Institute on Community Integration
University of Minnesota
109 Pattee Hall
150 Pillsbury Dr. SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455
(612)624-4512

http://www.ici.coled.umn.edu/ici/ (Web)

Discovering the Seven Threads of Inclusion

In schools throughout the United States, educators are working to include students with disabilities as members of age-appropriate classrooms in their home schools. Through a great many struggles, they are trying to create school communities in which every student truly belongs. One way to visualize their efforts is as weavers of a tapestry called *inclusion*.

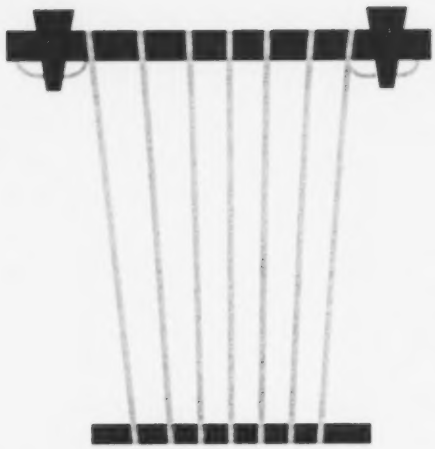
In Minnesota, two federally-funded research projects brought together university, school district, and state education personnel, along with families, to find ways to weave that tapestry in the context of general eduation reform efforts (Vandercook, Erickson, York & McDevitt, 1992; Vandercook et al., 1993). These two grant partnerships yielded important outcomes for the educators, students, and families involved, as well as expanded knowledge about inclusion that will be useful in many other schools.

Among the lessons learned were that there are seven types of thread that are necessary in a strong, lasting tapestry of inclusion. They are —

- Contribution
- Commitment
- Complexity
- Circle of Influence
- Communication
- Courage/Consideration
- Collaboration

The warp threads, the anchoring threads into which the rest are woven, are the threads of Contribution: recognizing and helping others to recognize the contributions each child can make to the school community. Contributions are experienced in many different ways. They are not always tied to what a child *does*, but may be more connected to the fundamental value and worth inherent in each human being. Each person will make contributions to the school community if supported to be present and valued for the unique skills, experiences, and perspectives each brings. Therefore, the threads of contribution support the whole tapestry, they provide the opportunity for connection among children, educators, and families, so that the contributions of each might be experienced by all.

The remaining six types of thread focus on the mindset and skills of those individuals involved in creating inclusive school communities. These broader overarching threads of commitment, complexity, circle of influence, communication, courage/consideration, and collaboration are helpful when engaging in the specific, concrete tasks of supporting children to be valued members and active participants, learners, and contributors in their school communities.



The Threads of Contribution

The first threads are those of contribution: recognizing and helping others to recognize the contributions each child can make to the school community. To have a child with a disability included as a member of his or her age-appropriate classroom community is not a favor, it is a right. And it is a gift to others. All children have many contributions that they have made in their families. They will also make many contributions to the classroom community if they are expected and supported to do so. There is no doubt that individuals with disabilities enrich the lives of others: they can expand and deepen perspectives, the ability to care, and the ability to look beyond the superficial to see that which lies within an individual (Gill, 1997; Moreno, 1998). Through relationships with individuals with disabilities and their families, many have experienced increased awareness of what is most important in life. Yet the influence of those who have not had these personal experiences, and who have limited and/or negative perspectives of individuals with disabilities, remains strong. It is easy to fall in line with this negativism, assessing and identifying all the needs, and neglecting to also identify the strengths of the individual. Yet, it is the strengths that should be built upon, and a vision of the contributions each person can make to those who get to know him or her should be communicated. Two brief stories follow to illustrate this point.

The first story is about a young girl named Catherine who had significant disabilities and attended school in an urban school district. After a fairly lengthy and challenging set of meetings and discussions, Catherine was finally given the support to attend her home school in the fall as a member of the fourth grade. Then, in December Catherine died early one Friday morning. After school that day, there was a knock on the door of her home by two classmates with a grocery sack of cards the class had written to Catherine. These were brought to Catherine's mom as a gift. The following excerpts illustrate the powerful contributions this one little girl made after only four months as a member of a general education classroom (Vandercook, 1991).

First, from the letters of her classmates—

- *I did not want to end this right at this moment. I feel terrible and all of us are sad. It will not be the same without you.* — Derek
- *We really loved you and we wish you were still here with us today. I hope you could just come back with a snap of someone's fingers.* — David
- *I bet everyone liked you in 4th, 5th, and 6th grade. I bet if everyone met you they would like you too. I'm sorry that you died. You were a sweet girl, you never bothered anyone. I will always remember you Catherine, you gave me something to think about. I really, really miss you Catherine. I don't know how you got Rett syndrome, but I sure wanted you to get better.* — Amanda

- *We really miss you and hope you're back. We liked you to be with us. We're going to miss you. Everybody wants you to be back. You make us happy. Our life is empty without you in your chair at school.* — Samol
- *Everyone is crying and saying things won't be the same with you gone. We won't be the same. You gave us a lot. You gave us respect for handicapped people, love for others, and showing people you don't need words to make friends.* — Karen

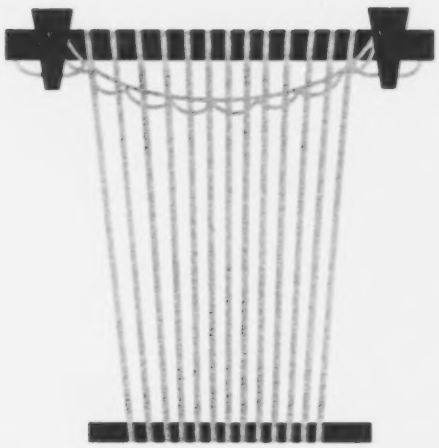
From the parent of one of Catherine's classmates —

- *Everyday if Jolene were to tell me a story about school, it was about Catherine. She said, "Mom, everybody loves Catherine." I cannot tell you about any of the other kids in Jolene and Catherine's class. Jolene only spoke of Catherine. On Friday, Jolene told me her last Catherine story. While I only met your daughter once, I felt I knew her well. Jolene's class was truly special and chosen to have Catherine. Jolene and her class gained a great deal from Catherine. You had a truly special child. She will be greatly missed.* — Jill

Lastly, from Catherine's fourth grade teacher —

- *If the worth of a person's life is judged by the effect they had on others, Catherine's presence will be felt for a lifetime in the hearts of many people. I speak not only for me but all the children she came in contact with. She fostered a deep caring and love. But maybe a longer lasting effect will be the understanding and compassion in the hearts and minds of everyone who came in contact with her. She, more than any other student I've ever had, belonged to not just you alone, but to everyone who came in contact with her and who loved her.* — Gwen

A second story of contribution is about a seventh grader named Dan, who is the definition of "infectious fun!" Dan contributes mightily to those who know him with his wonderful sense of humor, creative imagination, and knack for making people feel good when they are around him. It is important for people to have the opportunity to get to know Dan more completely, to see him as not just the boy "who talks funny and is sometimes hard to understand," but also as Dan, who is funny and fun, sensitive and insightful, caring and determined, and a delight to be around. In the area of determination, Dan adds the gift of persistence to his school community. Learning is very hard work for him and yet he comes back to try and try again. It is only one of his many gifts, but what an inspiring and encouraging example he sets.



The Threads of Commitment

The second set of threads reflect the importance of commitment because the concept of inclusive classrooms and schools challenges old paradigms (ways of looking at and doing things). Without revised paradigms about schools, inclusion is a difficult concept to implement. To sustain inclusion over time requires letting go of old paradigms of service delivery and committing to new paradigms for the typical classroom. To better understand this thread, it is helpful to describe and compare a traditional service delivery paradigm for educating students with disabilities and an alternative paradigm that supports an inclusive approach to meeting student needs (see opposite page).

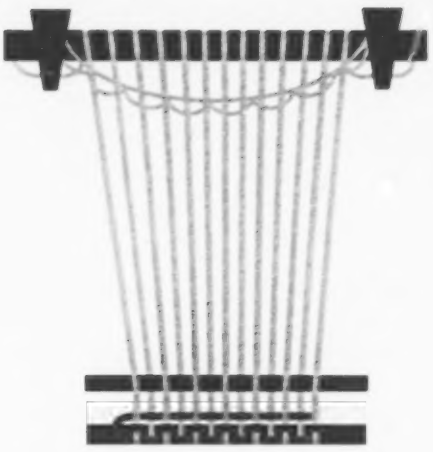
These newer paradigms or ways of thinking about educating students represent a major shift in perspective. It is important that the challenge of paradigm shifts be recognized. It is a process that requires a commitment to being open to new ways of thinking and doing. Personally, I can still remember the very first time I heard someone speak about inclusive education. My initial response was, "Sounds like a nice idea, but there is *no* way they are talking about the students I work with!" Paradigm shifts involve an old paradigm being questioned, a new paradigm being put forth, and a willingness to consider and explore this new way of thinking and doing. For many, this considering and exploring phase means connecting with and learning from others who are engaged in an inclusive approach to meeting student needs, as well as personal experience in working to provide an inclusive education for children. These personal connections lead to seeing and experiencing the benefits (and the challenges!) of inclusive community for children, educators, and families. It is often, at that point, that individuals experience a strong sense of commitment to pursuing and supporting alternative paradigms that support an inclusive approach to meeting student needs (York-Barr, Schultz, Doyle, Kronberg, & Crossett, 1996).

Many schools continue to operate under the traditional paradigms; some educators are working very hard to change personal perceptions and practices. Because of this, a strong commitment to the creation of an inclusive school community is essential to success. In order to cope with the many barriers that will stand in the way of success, a very clear vision of what is desired for children, both now and in the future, is necessary (Senge, 1990).

Traditional and Alternative Service Delivery Paradigms

Paradigm	Traditional	Alternative
How students with disabilities are served	Students with disabilities have special needs, so they need to be educated in separate, special places, with separate, special teachers.	Students with disabilities have special needs, so appropriate support is needed for them to successfully participate as members of age-appropriate, general education classes. In partnership with the general educator, the special educator is an integral part of the team that designs and implements individualized programs.
How students with disabilities are viewed	By definition, students with disabilities have deficits that need to be remediated. They have limited potential for learning. These students need assistance and need to be taken care of.	Students with disabilities have both strengths and needs. They have the ability to make many significant contributions. Students with disabilities can provide assistance to others, not just receive it. They continue to learn throughout their lives and a focus needs to be placed on identifying what is relevant for each student based on a vision of what and how that student wants to be now and in the future.
How general education classrooms are run	Classrooms are primarily teacher directed and students are passive recipients of information. As a student, one either keeps up with the class or is referred out for special services. In effect, students earn the right to stay with or return to their peers in the general education classroom based upon performance (Kunc, 1992).	Students are actively engaged in learning through the use of many different structures, and teachers use differentiated instruction (Kronberg and York-Barr, 1998). Students have the right to remain in the classroom and have their unique needs met in that setting. This right is based on age, not on a child's ability to do grade level work.
How general and special educators and families work together	General educators work with students who are average, making referrals for students who are below or well-above average. Special educators work with students who are performing significantly below average. Teaching is in small groups or one-on-one, in isolation from other adults (except for the occasional therapist). The therapist may work with the same students, but typically this, too, is in isolation from other adults. Educators are the experts and parents are the recipients of information about their child.	General educators work with a wide range of diverse student needs. The diverse needs exist along many dimensions, including ability. Instruction is differentiated to meet all student needs; many instructional grouping arrangements are used, and other adults are included in instructional teams. Instructional teams may include special educators, parents, community volunteers, and other students. These people work in collaboration and support each other in the process of meeting diverse student needs. Families are especially critical partners for students with disabilities because they are often the most informed and committed experts when it comes to their child and his or her needs.

Section 3



The Threads of Complexity

A third set of threads is the recognition of the complexity involved in creating inclusive educational programs. It is anything but a simple, straightforward process; it is complex, multi-faceted, and ongoing. How could it be simple, considering the task involves the —

- Child, with his or her many strengths and needs.
- Classroom community and its structure.
- Strengths and needs of the classroom teacher.
- Strengths and needs of special education support personnel.
- Strengths and needs of the child's family.
- Strengths and needs of classmates.
- School and its structures, mission, vision, values.
- Strengths and needs of the school staff and the community it serves.
- School district and its structures, mission, vision, values.
- Strengths and needs of district staff and the broader community they serve.
- State and its structures, mission, vision, values.
- Strengths and needs of the state department staff and the communities it serves.
- Federal government and its structures, mission, vision, values.
- Strengths and needs of federal government staff and the many communities they serve.

As this list indicates, an educational system includes many critical components. These components and the relationships that exist between them must be taken into account when attempting changes, such as those involved in becoming a more inclusive school community. With all of those variables, it is necessary to acknowledge that the task of creating inclusive school communities is complicated and there are not easy answers or magic bullets, and there are not "right" answers or only one way to do things. Although we would like it to be, the development of inclusive communities is not a linear process, and is not something that can be prescribed. It is important to validate the struggles, to acknowledge the complexity, and then to do whatever can be done to support one another.

The Threads of a Circle of Influence

A fourth set of threads come from an awareness of the concepts of *circle of influence* and *circle of concern*, and from a striving to focus on circle of influence rather than circle of concern. The concepts of circle of influence and circle of concern come from Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989). They help to illustrate his Habit 1, "Be proactive." People, in seeking to be proactive, focus on those things that they can do something about. By focusing their energy and attention within their circle of influence, their circle of influence expands and grows.

Individuals are operating from a reactive stance when they focus on their circle of concern, those things over which they have little to no control. They focus on the weaknesses of others ("If only the principal was more supportive of inclusion"), or the problems in the environment ("If only the graduation standards didn't have the teachers so uptight") or circumstances over which they have little or no control ("If only teachers valued my perspective more"). The negative energy generated by focusing on these concerns, combined with neglect of areas they could do something about, causes their circle of influence to shrink.

Emphasizing the circle of influence does not mean that people stop working on things they are concerned about. Rather, it means that the work is done more effectively through working within one's circle of influence. Therefore, it is not a matter of waiting until circumstances or people are different, and then doing something, but instead doing what one can do that does not depend upon others changing first.

The application of this habit (Vandercook, 1996) is exemplified by an elementary classroom teacher who was given the opportunity to visit a neighboring district as part of a staff development educational exchange program. The elementary school that this teacher visited works very hard to include children with disabilities in general education classrooms and to provide the support necessary to meet their needs in those settings. The visiting teacher was energized by this concept and saw benefits for all children and adults in a school community. Upon return to his own school, the teacher presented a report of his visit at a staff meeting. The idea of including children with disabilities in general education classrooms met a barrage of objections: "It costs too much", "How could we possibly do that?", "I have no training", "I don't think you understand the very special needs that these children have", and "The needs of those children could never be addressed in a regular classroom."

If the visiting teacher had responded reactively to this barrage — focusing on all of the concerns raised and believing that, until those issues were resolved,

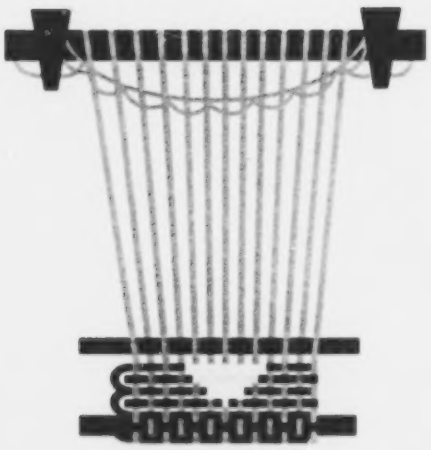
nothing could be done to support a more inclusive school community — it is certain that nothing would change. If, however, the visiting teacher responded proactively, he might —

- Request that some fifth grade age students with disabilities be placed in his fifth-grade classroom.
- Participate in the IEP meetings of these students to better understand the unique needs of each student and to insure that adequate support is provided.
- Provide updates at staff meetings to share successes and concerns and invite follow-up conversations with anyone interested in learning more or helping to address some of the issues.

With these actions, changes would occur and it is likely that this teacher's influence would expand.

To think that the problem is "out there" is circle of concern thinking. This view of the change paradigm is outside-in: what is out there has to change before I can change. The proactive approach to change is inside-out, which means to change oneself first and, by being different, to effect positive change in what is out there. A profound example of being proactive comes from Jason Kingsley and Mitchell Levitz, two young men with Down syndrome who are discussing Down syndrome (Kingsley & Levitz, 1994) —

> *Jason*: Down syndrome will change to "up" syndrome, and that will make Down syndrome go away.
>
> *Mitchell*: No, the disability never can change. We'll call it "change" syndrome. Things change around if you think about it. The reason we should call it "change" syndrome is we can't change the disability, but we CAN change the way we feel.



The Threads of Communication

The fifth set of threads represent the importance of effective communication. Interpersonal communication is an expansive topic and volumes have been written about the mindset and skills needed to communicate effectively. The focus of communication here comes from another of Covey's (1989) seven habits: "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."

This is probably the single most important principle in the field of interpersonal relations. Seeking first to understand represents a deep shift in paradigm. When "listening" to someone, usually people listen with the intent to reply, thinking about what to say in response to the other person. To interact effectively with others and to influence them (a primary goal of parents and teachers), one must first understand the other person. This kind of empathic listening does not necessarily mean agreeing with the speaker, but rather, fully, deeply understanding that person, emotionally as well as intellectually, and being open to their influence. Openness must go both ways — to be influential, one must be willing to be influenced.

An example of empathic listening can be found in an interaction between a teacher and inclusion facilitator (Vandercook, 1996). The third grade teacher (Renee) has been teaching for 20 years and will have a student (Lynn) with significant mental and physical disabilities in her classroom for the first time next year. The student's case manager (Sue) is an inclusion facilitator for the elementary school and was formerly the teacher of a self-contained special education classroom in the building. Renee has just learned that Lynn is on her class list next year and that a meeting is scheduled in two weeks to plan for Lynn's membership in the third grade. The following conversation is an illustration of Sue listening to Renee in a manner that demonstrates "seek first to understand" —

Renee: Hi Sue. Do you have a minute?

Sue: Sure, come on in!

Renee: You know, I've been teaching for 20 years, but lately the demands are snowballing. I've just had it!

Sue: It sounds like you are really frustrated with your job.

Renee: Well, there is always something, but the idea of having Lynn in my room next year is the last straw. What could I possibly teach her? And who is going to attend to all of her physical needs? It's ridiculous!

Sue: It sounds like you feel overwhelmed and very unsure about meeting Lynn's needs in your classroom.

Renee: You bet! I have to teach language arts, social studies, science, math, and art. I don't think those subjects make sense for Lynn who can't speak, or read, or write, or do any of the things needed to learn those subjects.

Sue: So you feel your classroom is a mismatch for Lynn's needs?

Renee: Well, yes, although I really don't know her needs.

Sue: Would it be helpful to learn a little bit about Lynn?

Renee: Well, yes, I mean here I am about to have a student enter my room and I have no idea what or how to teach her and I'm the teacher!

Sue: So you're feeling this huge sense of responsibility and also feeling scared that you won't know what to do.

Renee: That's it exactly! So what can I do?

Sue: Well, Lynn is in Carl's class this year. You might want to spend some time in there, observing her, interacting with her, and also talking with Carl, and Judy, the classroom assistant, and with Lynn's classmates.

Renee: But there's only one of me to go around. No one is going to have time to take my class so I can do that!

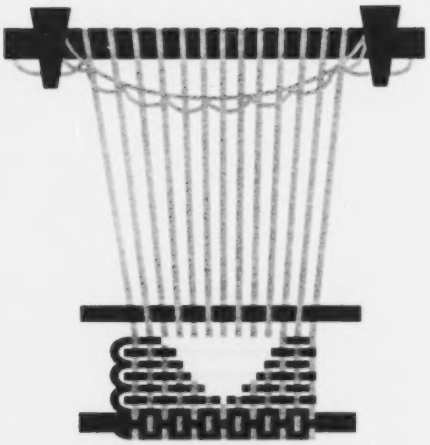
Sue: So you'd like to spend time in second grade with Lynn, but you feel like asking someone to take your class during that time would be too much to ask?

Renee: Yes. Do you have any suggestions?

Sue: I'd love to take your class so that you can spend time in second grade. It will also be helpful for me to start getting a better handle on third grade curriculum so that I'll be able to work more effectively with you next year in meeting Lynn's needs.

Imagine what the conversation might have sounded like had Sue attempted to evaluate what Renee was sharing ("You're just stressed out because it is the end of the school year"), or interpret Renee's feelings and provide advice based upon that interpretation ("I used to think it would never work either, but it will. You just need to relax and give it some time"). Not only would Renee have felt devalued, she would have received no support and would have felt even more overwhelmed.

Section 6



The Threads of Courage and Consideration

Courage and consideration are the sixth set of threads. They refer to the courage to speak up in a considerate way. The combination of courage and consideration involves sharing one's perspective (in a considerate way) with someone who sees it differently, and the courage to communicate (in a considerate way) when one is feeling devalued by what the other person has said or done.

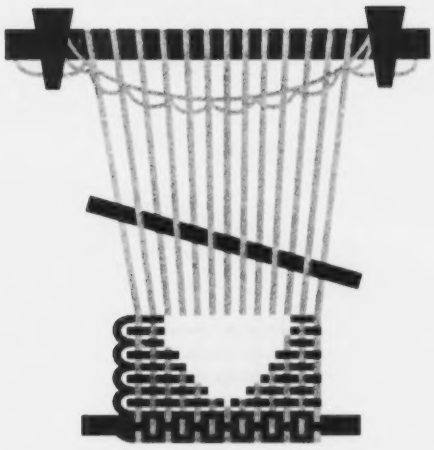
When conflict occurs in the work of creating inclusive school communities, there is often a strong desire to ignore, control, or deny that the conflict exists (Vandercook and Montie, pp.1–4). The outcome of attempting to address conflict by these methods is that people experience a sense of exclusion, which inevitably leads to dis-investment in the task of developing inclusive schools. It is not only ineffective, but also inconsistent with the goal of inclusive community, to use approaches that result in the exclusion of people's perspectives, ideas, and ultimately their participation in the ongoing design and support of an inclusive community.

An example may help to illustrate this point. Let's return to Renee, the classroom teacher who was introduced in the previous section on communication. Assume that Renee is in a meeting about her prospective new student Lynn, but does not feel comfortable sharing her perspectives because they appear to be so different from those of the other people at the meeting. Lynn's dad is ecstatic about his daughter's move to third grade, the principal is feeling very pleased and proud of her school's innovative practice of supporting the membership of children with disabilities in general education classrooms, and the inclusion facilitator is bubbly about helping Renee succeed in the third grade. Imagine Renee is sitting at this meeting and thinking in her mind things like, "How could I possibly raise concerns when everyone else seems to have none?", "I don't think it would do any good to object to Lynn being in my class anyway, everyone's mind seems to be set on that happening", "This seems so ludicrous, I can't imagine being able to do a good job for Lynn!", "Who is responsible for her curriculum anyway; I sure don't have the faintest idea what to teach her or how to do it!" How invested will Renee be in supporting Lynn's inclusion in third grade? How supportive will she be of the school's effort to provide an inclusive education for each student? Her investment and enthusiasm would likely be low and the school year would likely be hard for all involved.

Suppose, however, that a different response to conflict existed in the school community, one that made it safe for Renee to share her different perspectives and concerns. Perhaps this school community overtly communicates about the importance of noticing and seeking to

understand alternative perspectives. If this ethic existed, it is likely that both the process and the outcome of the meeting would be dramatically different. Renee would have the courage to share her concerns in a considerate manner and others would seek to understand those perspectives, be open to being influenced by them, and be committed to continuing in the communication in order to attend to the ongoing conflict that can be expected as people engage in the complex work of supporting an inclusive community.

Courage is needed to commit to inclusive education for children, knowing this is often uncharted territory and that one may carry a large part of the load, at least initially. It takes courage to communicate the gifts, strengths, and contributions that all children possess when historically children with disabilities have been viewed as individuals who need assistance. To focus on the gifts and potential of a person with a disability results in being labeled unrealistic, in denial, and filled with false hope. It takes courage to hang in there through all the peaks and valleys, the complexity that comes from the multiple layers of individuals and systems that have an impact on a child's education in her school community. It takes courage to remain focused on one's circle of influence rather than camping out in the easier circle of concern. It is so easy to point a finger at others and lament that if only they would do _____. In the long run, however, for those who care deeply about children, it is not easy to stay comfortably focused on the circle of concern. Wishing, hoping, and hollering for others to change first leaves one powerless, hopeless, and frustrated, while one's circle of influence shrinks and children's lives are diminished waiting for the system to change. It takes courage to stay in the communication, to truly attempt to understand another person and that person's perspective prior to communicating one's own perspective. There is also the risk of being influenced by another's perspective. It takes courage and strength to be true to personal values. Most people want to be considerate of others and treat people in valuing ways. Sometimes, however, it takes a great deal of courage and strength to be considerate. It can be especially hard when interacting with someone who has been less than considerate and valuing. Being considerate does not require agreeing with the other person or accepting devaluing treatment. Focusing on one's circle of influence allows one to respond on the basis of values, not impulses, emotions, or ingrained habits of aggression when others see things differently or treat people inconsiderately.



The Threads of Collaboration

The last threads in the tapestry of inclusion represent collaboration. It was alluded to earlier in the "commitment" section and is part of creating a new paradigm that involves general and special educators, families, community volunteers, and students working together to meet diverse student needs in today's schools. There are many things involved in having an effective collaborative team and engaging in an effective collaborative teaming process (Thousand & Villa, 1992). Like the other threads, courage is one of the requirements for effective collaboration. There must be a willingness to break with the tradition of working in isolation and hold fast to the belief that all members of the team have unique and needed expertise. It is risky for classroom teachers to allow other adults into the classroom to observe and provide support. It can be scary for special educators to work with larger groups of students and to suggest and develop necessary curricular adaptations. It takes courage for parents to actively participate in program development. One tangible sign of movement toward true collaboration will be the day people stop saying "the team and the parents," and instead just say, " the team" and know that this includes the student and the parents.

An exciting illustration of this collaborative ethic can be found at Bluff Creek Elementary School in Chanhassan, Minnesota (Vandercook, Nelson, Montie, & Bralts, 1998). The school building is designed to support a family-like, collaborative approach to student and adult learning. Individual classrooms are grouped into "family clusters" to promote multiage learning groups. The classrooms, shared by instructional teams, encircle a large area in which the entire cluster can meet. Each cluster also includes mid-size and small conference rooms, a team planning area for teachers and support staff, and a locker and restroom area. The staff for each cluster consists of four or five homeroom teachers, a special education caretaker (sometimes a general education teacher playing a dual role), student teachers, a learning readiness teacher, and paraprofessionals who may specialize in special education, learning readiness, Title I, or mastery learning.

At Bluff Creek, all students, including those who receive special education support, are included in clusters with their same-age peers. The school is able to provide needed support services within each cluster because —

- The staff is committed to a collaborative approach.
- Space is provided for different instructional arrangements (one-to-one, small groups, and large group) within the cluster.

- The special education caretaker is a member of the cluster team, with primary responsibilities for supporting all students identified as eligible for special education in that cluster. The caretaker also attends to IEPs, behavioral issues, and communication with paraprofessionals and other teachers.
- The teacher for gifted and talented students works collaboratively with classroom teachers to incorporate enrichment and expansion strategies into the curriculum for all students, not just those identified as gifted.
- Everyone within a cluster regroups to work on a particular curricular area, like math, at the same time. Sometimes instruction is multiage, other times ability-grouped. This is unlike the traditional approach in which the child receiving special education is removed from the classroom for individual instruction.

This inclusive approach to service delivery has created many successes in meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students. Two of many possible stories depict these successes.

Allen came to Bluff Creek as a fourth grader with a label of moderate/severe disabilities. He could identify numbers to five, some letters, and was working on writing his name. He was encouraged by the staff, supported by his peers, and began to flourish. Allen received some paraprofessional support throughout the day and most of his work was modified to his ability level. In thematics, however, he continued to participate at the fourth grade level, engaging in discussions and projects in cooperative groups. He gave an impressive *Power Point* presentation on irrigation. He was the only child to raise his hand after listening to a story on discrimination and offered his empathetic version of why the man in the story probably felt so angry. Allen demonstrated a three year increase in ability as measured by language assessments conducted in the fall and again in the spring. On the WISC R III he is no longer classified as a child with moderate/severe disabilities, but now falls within the mild/moderate range. And perhaps one of the more meaningful outcomes is that Allen now helps teach first and second graders computer technology skills each afternoon.

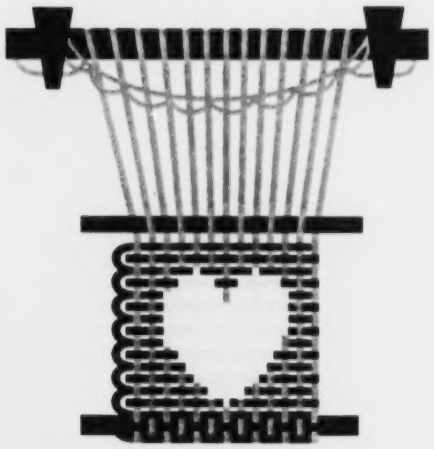
The second story is about the Young Inventor's Fair, a pull-out program for gifted and talented students in which the district had participated for 15 years. The gifted and talented coordinator, now working with Bluff Creek, used to work with six or eight students from each of the district's four elementary schools. Often, one or two of a school's students earned spots among the finalists. Last year at Bluff Creek, all third and fourth grade students learned about inventions and 18 inventions were submitted to the regional contest. Ten of those were selected by an independent panel of professional scientists and engineers to be among the 100 state finalists. Only 2 of the 10 winning students would previously even have qualified to participate. Furthermore, the 10 winners represented the entire spectrum of academic abilities, including students receiving special education. Many children and adults were caught up in the excitement of critical thinking and creativity and talked about invention at lunch, on the playground, and at neighborhood gatherings. The following year other district elementary schools also opened this "enrichment" opportunity to all students.

Staff members as well as students experience a real sense of inclusion at Bluff Creek, where there is an ethic of collaboration in using space and supporting students and each other. Students are connected with many adults, providing the opportunity to learn from and be appreciated by staff members who use different teaching approaches and personal styles of interaction.

One final example of collaboration involves Dan's team (the infectiously fun 7th grader introduced in the "contributions" section). Dan's team uses the PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) (Pearpoint, O'Brien, & Forest, 1993) process to design an individual plan for meeting Dan's needs as a member of his neighborhood school community. The process focuses on identifying goals and developing plans for meeting current needs that also align with a vision of Dan in the future: A vision that sees him as an independent, interdependent, capable person who knows what he wants and needs and is connected to others who can support Dan in fulfilling his dreams. The meeting occurs at Dan's home and he is the host. Dan and his family work in collaboration with the educators on the team to establish the agenda for the meeting. The focus is on identifying and building upon Dan's strengths. In keeping with the vision of Dan as an independent, interdependent, capable person, Dan is encouraged and supported to take initiative with regard to this collaborative planning event. Over the years, this has involved everything from Dan sending invitations, making name tags, and planning the menu, to scheduling a meeting with the principal of his school prior to the PATH meeting. Dan scheduled the meeting with the principal to insure that the principal had the PATH meeting on his calendar, that he had directions to Dan's home, and that he was aware that Dan had been making good choices on the playground lately.

Dan's team does three things very well that are essential to effective collaboration —

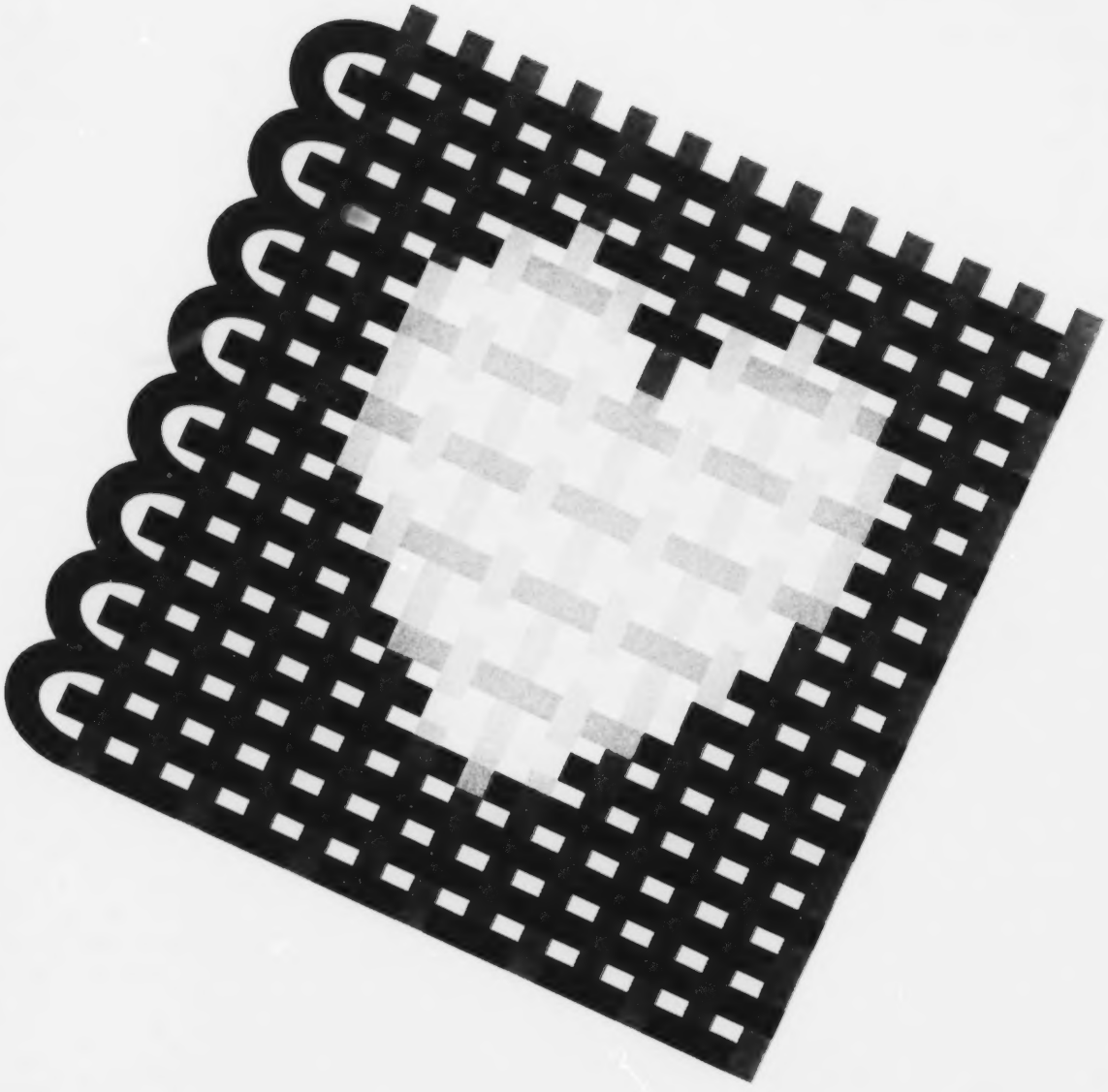
- They truly value the unique expertise that each member brings to the team. This includes family members as central and very active members of the team.
- Team members often take on non-traditional roles in order to provide for Dan's unique needs. Examples would include the principal checking in with Dan around Dan's improved behavior and the speech therapist attending Dan's conferences with the classroom teacher.
- They are committed to ongoing conversations and connections, including regular attention to the home school connection. Their collaboration does not consist soley of an annual PATH meeting, but rather, involves frequent communication and attention to relationship-building among team members.



Pulling the Threads Together

The seven threads to strengthen community fabric (commitment, contribution, complexity, circle of influence, communication, courage/consideration, and collaboration) are each important on their own. However, when woven together they result in a tapestry that is strong, flexible, and hopeful for the task of creating inclusive school communities. As discussed in the introductory section, the first threads, the warp threads, represent a primary purpose of inclusive school communities, the opportunity for connection among children, educators, and families, so that the contributions of each might be experienced by all. The remaining six types of thread woven into the warp threads focus upon the mindset and skills of those individuals involved in creating inclusive school communities. The weaving of these threads creates a tapestry that both sets the stage for creating an inclusive school and sustains these efforts on an ongoing basis. These broad overarching threads are helpful when engaged in specific, concrete tasks such as adapting curriculum, designing individual educational programs, or enhancing social relationships. One could think of the seven threads as those necessary to weave the tapestry of inclusion upon which are embroidered the specific tasks involved in supporting a child's membership, belonging, and learning in her school community. It is also important that these threads remain strong in order to provide continued support for the complex work of sustaining inclusive schools.

Why is a strong community fabric so important in schools? As described by Sergiovanni (1994), "The need for community is universal. A sense of belonging, of continuity, of being connected to others and to ideas and values that make our lives meaningful and significant — these needs are shared by all of us." (p.xiii). Better understanding of and attention to the fabric of community and its many threads will assist in weaving wonderful tapestries of inclusive school communities.



References

Covey, S.R. (1989). *The 7 habits of highly effective people*. New York, NY: Fireside.

Gill, B. (1997). *Changed by a child*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Kingsley, J., & Levitz, M. (1994). *Count us in*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Kronberg, R. & York-Barr, J. (1998). *Differentiated teaching and learning in heterogeneous classrooms: Strategies for meeting the needs of all students.* (pp. 1–4).Minneapolis: Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

Kunc, N. (1992). The need to belong: Rediscovering Maslow's hierarchy of needs. R.A. Villa, J.S. thousand, W. Stainback, & S. Stainback (Eds.), *Restructuring for caring and effective education* (pp. 25–39). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Moreno, K. (1998). Parenting and the parable of the Taoist farmer. *Tuesday's Child. 2*, 6–7.

Pearpoint, J., O'Brien, J., & Forest, M. (1996). *PATH: Planning alternative tomorrows with hope: A workbook for planning possible positive futures*. (2nd ed.) Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Inclusion Press.

Senge, P.M. (1970). *The fifth discipline*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Sergiovanni, T. (1984). *Building community in schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Thousand, J.S. & Villa, R.A. (1992). Collaborative teams: A powerful tool in school restructuring. In R.A. Villa, J.S. Thousand, W. Stainback, & S. Stainback (Eds.), *Restructuring for caring and effective education* (pp. 25–39). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Vandercook, T. (1991, Fall). The power of one. *Impact, 4*, 8–9. Minneapolis: Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

Vandercook, T. (1996, Spring). The 7 habits for educators. *Impact, 9*, 1, 22–23. Minneapolis: Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

Vandercook, T., Abery, B., Montie, J., Prest, G., Bonner, M., Koch, T., & Johnson, R. (1999). *Shared responsibility.* Minneapolis: Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

Vandercook, T., Erickson, W., York, J., & McDevitt, M. (1992). *Together we're better: Inclusive school communities in Minnesota/partnerships for systems change*. Minneapolis: Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

Vandercook, T., Nelson, M., Montie, J., & Bralts, B. (1998). A school dedicated to inclusion. *Principal, 77* 37–39.

York-Barr, J., Schultz, T., Doyle, M.B., Kronberg, R., & Crossett, S. (1996). Inclusive schooling in St. Cloud: Perspectives on the process and people. *Remedial and special education, 17*, 92-105.

Other *Together We're Better* Publications. . .

Hey, We See It Differently!

by L. Walz, T. Vandercook. L. Medwetz, and M. Nelson

This booklet summarizes the lessons learned on teaming through a collaborative process seeking to create inclusive learning environments in schools. The lessons do not align with conventional wisdom related to effective teaming, so, the authors see teaming differently! (1998).

A Preferred Future Worksheet: A Process for School Teams

by L. Medwetz, T. Vandercook, and G. Hoganson

This worksheet and instruction guide provide a planning tool that can help teams analyze the current situation, identify a preferred future, and create a plan of action. It includes tips for forming teams and facilitating the process, as well as detailed directions for each step in developing a plan for achieving a preferred future in relation to an issue or problem. (1998).

Lessons for Understanding: An Elementary School Curriculum on Perspective-Taking

by T. Vandercook, L. Medwetz, J. Montie, P. Taylor, and K. Scaletta

A curriculum developed for grades K–5 to increase student understanding and appreciation of different perspectives, leading to respect for diversity and support for truly inclusive school communities. The 24 lessons are clustered in four units: My Perspective, Other Perspectives, Understanding Conflict, and Working Together. The curriculum is designed to be used in classrooms where students with and without disabilities learn together, and suggested adaptations are included. A unique feature is a focus on strengthening home-school partnerships. The lessons make use of 19 storybooks available through most bookstores and libraries. (1997).

Lessons for Understanding: A Junior High and High School Curriculum on Perspective-Taking

by L. Walx, M. Nelson, and K. Scaletta

A curriculum developed for secondary students to increase student understanding and appreciation of different perspectives, leading to respect for diversity and support for truly inclusive school communities. The 20 lessons are clustered in four units: My Perspective — Understanding Perspectives and Where They Come From; Other Perspectives — Developing Awareness of Different Perspectives; Accepting Others — Developing Skills and Attitudes for Valuing Different Perspectives; and Working Together — Applying Perspective-Taking Skills to Improve Solutions. (1998).

Teacher Efficacy in Heterogeneous Fifth and Sixth Grade Classrooms

by R. Kronberg

A report that breaks new ground in examining teachers' in-depth descriptions of the contextual relationships between heterogeneous classrooms, teacher efficacy, and teaching and learning. This study followed four teachers, seeking to understand how they view the relationship between personal teaching efficacy and teaching and learning. (1998).

For cost and ordering information, contact the Publications Office, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota • 612-624-4512 or 612-624-9344 (fax).